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ABSTRACT

This study investigated what Virginia high school social studies teachers thought about the new Standards of Learning (SOL) mandates. The grounded theory ethnographic study collected data through interviews with five teachers, observations of social studies department meetings and classes, and school system and SOL program documents. Findings show that teachers have not embraced the SOL tests. Their solutions varied from temporarily ignoring the tests to covering as much content as possible at the end of units. In spite of the SOL tests, teachers were able to maintain private professional goals for their students, such as teaching them to question historical facts while evaluating texts critically. Teachers indicated that they had not changed their teaching methods, but classroom observations suggested that they did hold occasional "cramming" sessions. (Contains 30 references.) (SLD)

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Negotiating Control and Protecting the Private: History Teachers and the Virginia Standards of Learning

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Negotiating control and protecting the private:
History teachers and the Virginia Standards of Learning

Ann Marie Smith, University of Maryland, College Park
Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association
Chicago, Illinois on April 22, 2003

While researchers have analyzed teachers' responses to state mandated assessments and curricula, studies have focused primarily on teachers' adaptive teaching strategies and initial reactions to state policies. Few researchers have delved beneath the upper layer of visible classroom activities to converse with teachers in depth, nor have educational researchers determined the extent to which teachers perpetuate or subvert the political ideologies that inform their school policies. The teachers in this ethnographic study found themselves positioned in a challenging political climate. In the name of school improvement, policymakers in the state of Virginia called for a revised, standard curriculum and a new battery of "high stakes tests" called the Virginia Standards of Learning. For this study, I interviewed and observed five high school social studies teachers in their classrooms and in departmental meetings as they participated in the social and intellectual work of teaching and curriculum planning. With the implementation of the new Virginia Standards of Learning (referred to as the S.O.L.s), the teachers in my study were required to work with other social studies teachers in their department to align county curricular objectives with the S.O.L. curriculum.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate what Virginia high school social studies teachers thought about the new S.O.L. mandates. Informed by theories on the teaching of social studies and historical text, my goal was to observe how social studies teachers responded to conflicts between their personal teaching philosophies and the public requirements of the Virginia Social Studies S.O.Ls. I was interested in how social studies teachers at Northwest High School (pseudonym) responded both privately and publicly to conflicts between their teaching philosophies and the S.O.L. curricular and test requirements. This ethnography was guided by the following questions:

- What is the nature of these teachers' instructional methods and what are their underlying beliefs about how history should be taught?
- How are teachers instructional methods shaped by the S.O.L. assessments and how are their methods shaped by conflicting teaching theories?
- What is the nature of high school teachers responses to the S.O.L. tests and curriculum in private and public settings?

Before exploring these questions with Northwest High School teachers, I researched background and evaluation on the Virginia Standards of Learning social studies curriculum and assessments. In this section, I describe this evaluation on the social and political context of the Virginia S.O.Ls, placing them in recent scholarship on trends in statewide curricula, high stakes assessments and other accountability policies. The implications of recent political education criticisms for the teaching of history and the ways in which the S.O.L controversies called attention to theories on social studies education are also addressed. In the second section, I present data from my ethnographic study on high school social studies teachers in the state of Virginia in order to consider the possibilities of the above questions. Further, I apply the results of my study to an analysis of the problems and possibilities of historical pedagogy in light of these history teachers' school contexts as they continuously negotiate within public and private arenas.

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The Virginia Standards of Learning in Context

The Virginia Standards of Learning (S.O.Ls) social studies curriculum became a political issue during the initial writing process, according to Linda Fore (1998) [1] Initiated by state governor George Allen, the purpose of designing the S.O.L. curricula was to develop "tough" academic content standards and state-wide tests. According to Fore (1998), Allen's goal was to create support for charter schools and vouchers by placing blame on public schools who, Allen suggested, were responsible for a "crisis" in education (Berliner and Biddle,1995; Fore, 1998). The S.O.L. design team, made up of politicians chosen by Governor Allen, sought to push a new educational reform which would eventually penalize students and schools for low test scores. Ignored were criticisms by teachers and school administrators, who reminded the S.O.L. design team about data from previous standardized test results, which showed that students in poorer school districts tended to produce lower standardized test scores (Fore, 1998, p. 566). These students and teachers of low income school districts were concerned about unfair penalization by future S.O.L. tests; there were no solutions offered for students who did not perform well on the tests--the burden would be shouldered by teachers and administrators.

Although state educators were originally invited to write the social studies standards, the members of the Governor's Commission on Champion Schools rejected the education committee's draft and wrote their own version of the standards. According to William Bosher, State Superintendent of Public Instruction (appointed by Governor Allen), the Commission on Champion Schools revised the standards to reflect both the school district's and the commission's drafts. Bosher explained that there was no way to communicate the revisions to the committee of educators before the standards became public (Farmer, 1995). This failure to communicate appeared to be the commission's method for anticipating the educators' objections to the commission's revisions. If the educators did not know about the revisions, they could not object, and the commission could maintain control over this final draft, which is exactly what occurred. In fact, according to one teacher, the commission's revisions made the educators' drafts unrecognizable (Farmer, 1996).

By Spring 2000, the social studies teachers in my study were preparing their students for the S.O.L. tests. These standardized tests, produced by Harcourt Educational Measurement, were constructed to match the S.O.L. curricula (Wermers, 2001). With Virginia teachers already feeling the pressure of the new S.O.L. curricula and upcoming tests, the State of Virginia informed the public media about the "high stakes" attached to S.O.L. scores. For example, beginning with the graduating class of 2004, students must pass at least six of the eleven S.O.L. exams in order to graduate. By 2007, schools could lose their accreditation if their students were unable to produce the required test scores (Seven Groups, 1999).

Education scholars have historically criticized unfair test uses and prescribed curricula (Darling-Hammond,1997; Giroux, 1988; McNeil, 2000; Wraga, 1999); however, some researchers have reported that teachers are able to improvise and adapt to state mandates by taking minimal class time to "teach to the test" (Kordalewski, 2000; McNeil, 2000). However, teachers may experience conflicts between their desire to make learning more meaningful for individual students and improve scores by teaching to the test. Social studies scholars have criticized standardized assessments for their emphasis on rote memorization at the expense of higher level critical reading and writing. Further, objective assessments that test "official knowledge"

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[1] Dr. Linda Fore, a professor of social studies education at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, researched early writing processes of the social studies Virginia Standards of Learning curriculum. Dr. Fore attended and taped sessions of the State Board of Education, the Blue Ribbon Task Force Committees, including a history subcommittee, and the meetings of the State Board of Education's Editing Committee. Dr. Fore also interviewed committee participants.

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often reflect a *heritage* approach to teaching history where history is presented as truth, and sources of facts are not interrogated. History and social studies educators have reflected on the complex nature of teaching history to students, recommending that students learn how to read, evaluate and make comparisons across multiple sources. (Afflerbach & VanSledright, 2001; Apple, 1992; Brophy &VanSledright, 1996; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Nash, Crabtree & Dunn, 1997; Popkewitz, 1996; Seixas, 1999; VanSledright, 1996, 2002; Wineburg, 1991, 2001).

Specifically in the US, women's contributions, along with those of racial and ethnic minorities, have been minimal or absent from school history texts. Feminist and political historians have theorized that these exclusions reflect the devaluation of the private realm where women and minorities in the US served supportive roles within home and family, arenas which were not readily visible nor important to public politics (Elshtain, 1995; Jones, 1988; Morris, 2000; Saxonhouse, 1992; Wineburg, 2001). The idea that there is one historical truth worthy of memorization has been called into question by revisionist historians who suggest that there are many histories that co-exist. Postmodern critics have argued that US history texts often reflect Western positivist ideologies which deny that there is more than one truth, and educators need to acknowledge the variety of historical truths that have previously been excluded from "published" history.

The Study

As a former high school English teacher who had experienced the high stakes nature of standardized tests, it was important that I focus my analysis on the voices of social studies teachers. Believing that the state of Virginia had ignored educators' recommendations and concerns, I felt obligated to encourage teachers to voice their perspectives on the Virginia S.O.L. social studies curriculum and tests (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As these teachers invited me into their classrooms and professional lives, I learned about the layers of politics embedded within social studies education. Recognizing that each of these teacher's perspectives has often been "eclipsed" by the voices of those who hold more political power, I encouraged teachers to talk about any aspect of the social studies S.O.Ls they thought was important (DeVault, 1993).

Methodology and Data Collection

Also essential to this study was the sense of place that informed these social studies teachers' work and language. Northwest High School, a suburban high school in Northern Virginia, is comprised of students from middle and working class families. The student population is multi-cultural: approximately 39% African Americans, 38% Caucasian, 11% Hispanic, 8% Middle Eastern, and 4% Asian. All of the high school history teachers I observed and interviewed had their Masters Degrees in history and one teacher, Mr. Anderson, was working on a doctorate in history.

I conducted this study as a grounded theory ethnography, allowing theory to emerge from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). To enhance research validity, I collected data from a variety of sources: I interviewed five teachers, attended social studies department meetings and observed classes over a period of one school year. I also collected teacher handouts, official S.O.L. curriculum guidelines and newspaper articles. Table 1 on the next page includes the number of hours I spent interviewing and observing each teacher.

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Table 1

Teachers	Classroom observations in # of hours	Class subject	Grade Level	Interviews in hrs.
Mrs. Jones. dept. chair 1999-00	did not observe			4
Mr. Andersonn. dept chair. 2000-01 yr.	6	American History	11	3
Mrs. Lawrence	6	World History	9	2.5
Mrs. Hanson	6	Humanities	9	3
Mrs. Thompson	6	American History	11	2

* All names are pseudonyms

Data analysis and results

The teachers explained their goals for the students and how the classroom activities met these goals. My role during these interviews was "listener" in order to capture the words and the language of the teachers (DeVault 1999). While the teachers were aware that I was investigating their reactions and opinions of the SOLs, I usually encouraged the teachers to choose the direction of our conversations, following an open-ended interview format (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Clandinin & Connelly, 1998).

Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed, and I wrote detailed notes during classroom observations, focusing on content, methods and the language of students and teachers. First, I applied a process of open coding for both observation notes and interviews using the research questions as a guide. After the transcripts were coded for related categories, I looked for patterns in the categories, then refined them into opposing themes, recommended by Strauss and Corbin (1998). As I became more familiar with the teachers' classroom methods and beliefs about social studies education, I talked to the teachers informally about the transcripts, rechecking my themes with the teachers' feedback on the transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Considering my research questions, three central themes captured the essence of the multiple data sources, which I discuss in the next section: (1) Northwest teachers' conflicts about teaching social studies as "heritage" history; (2) Northwest teachers' emphasis on teaching comprehension and critical reading strategies; and (3) Teachers' intentional isolation from public/political S.O.L. discussions and participation outside of school arenas.

Theme 1. Northwest teachers' conflicts about teaching social studies as "heritage" history

While history education includes analyses of *heritage* in the form of essential facts, teaching history as an interpretive practice requires students to criticize, evaluate and rewrite history by re-constructing the past through an analysis of multiple sources. Northwest High School teachers were aware of the heritage content underlying the S.O.L. curriculum and tests. At the same time, the teachers were sensitive to the importance of teaching students about the roles and contributions of women and minorities to world and US history. Northwest teachers occasionally used primary sources that represented the voices of women and minorities even though the S.O.L. test questions would probably not address this content. While Northwest teachers were aware of the limitations and prejudices of the S.O.L "heritage" curriculum and tests, I did not observe classes where teachers interrogated these exclusions with their students.

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Mr. Anderson, who taught US history, was mindful of critical theories and the need to incorporate multiple sources. He taught students to apply historical research methodology in classroom activities as they read about the lives and contributions of US men and women of all races and classes. For example, students in one class were asked to write critical evaluations of primary source narratives by explaining how the authors' experiences reflected the circumstances of the Civil War. After class, I asked Mr. Anderson about his teaching methods and how they had changed since the implementation of the S.O.L. tests. He replied, "They (S.O.Ls) haven't changed the way I have presented the material; however, they've changed the way I'm being evaluated and the evaluation is flawed because the test is flawed." According to Mr. Anderson, this "flaw" was the multiple choice format of the S.O.Ls., which required students to memorize historical facts. Before the S.O.L tests emerged, Mr. Anderson told me he had recommended that the county adopt the New York state exams, which included a section on interpretive essay writing about primary sources. Referring to the National Center for History in the Schools as the professional source that guided his teaching, Mr. Anderson explained that the New York State exam more closely represented the NCHS goals (Nash, 1994).

In spite of his insistence that critical thinking and writing were emphasized in his social studies classes, Mr. Anderson occasionally reverted to a fact-delivery format. After one lecture class, he explained, "We were behind on the S.O.Ls, so I had to get the students caught up." Fast-paced activity was typical for his classroom, and students usually directed class discussions or presented information they had written. Mr. Anderson required the students to cite quotes from both primary sources and textbooks to defend their oral and written analyses. On this day, however, preparation for the S.O.Ls appeared to force Mr. Anderson to quickly deliver the necessary information in lecture format. "We've also received a mandate from the county asking us to develop critical thinking skills. While this is important, the state and county keep expanding the curriculum without expanding our time," Mr. Anderson explained. While the county's educational values appeared to more closely reflect those of Mr. Anderson and the other social studies teachers at Northwest High School, the S.O.L tests, with their list of required names, dates, and places, reinforced the "fact as truth" theory of teaching history.

Mrs. Thompson, who taught American history to sophomores and juniors, used film to help students understand the idea that history is a "story" and facts are interpreted by historians to create accounts of historical events. She spent one class period showing a documentary on the first African American Civil War unit. The documentary discussed racial and cultural issues affecting the soldiers. The students were asked to write about the videotape and compare the events to the Hollywood movie *Glory*. The students were able to question the events and criticize the "Hollywood history" while analyzing issues of racism presented in both the film and the documentary. While film is a different kind of text, this comparison of the films opened up discussion about interpretations of history in print and film.

Theme 2. Northwest teachers' beliefs about teaching comprehension and critical reading strategies

With experience comes knowledge, not only about the teaching of social studies, but about how to teach under time constraints, overcrowded classroom conditions and political mandates, such as the Virginia S.O.Ls. The history teachers at Northwest High School experienced value conflicts--they had to make complex choices about how to best cover the S.O.L. curriculum and help students learn details and facts for the S.O.L. tests. Although the teachers described their theories about how history should be taught, their theories became evident in their classroom language and methods.

When asked about her goals for teaching ninth grade world history, Mrs. Lawrence emphasized the teaching of "overriding" ideas along with historical facts. Mrs. Lawrence explained,

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> students need connections and background knowledge in order to remember facts for the S.O.Ls. The tests cover the curriculum, but there's no authentic assessment involved. The test questions are not defined for the teachers ahead of time, making it difficult for any teacher trying to meet the standards. The reading level of the S.O.L. test questions is too high for ninth graders--most read at or below grade level.

To enhance reading comprehension, Mrs. Lawrence required her students to use graphic organizers while they read their class text and primary sources. This "reading instruction" seemed to be her way of helping her students to understand and remember the large amount of historical content she was required to teach for the S.O.L. tests. For example, during one class, students worked on "a story board" project, which was a visual reading chart that students constructed on the Protestant Reformation. The purpose of this assignment, according to Mrs. Lawrence, was to help ninth grade students remember and analyze the teachings, effects, and beliefs of the leaders who were "instrumental in the Protestant Reformation" (Martin Luther, John Calvin, King Henry VIII). Students cited the class textbook and other primary sources to create a bibliography for the storyboard. Students could use pictures or symbols to create the storyboard in order to remember the information visually. Mrs. Lawrence hoped the visual organizers would enhance students' reading comprehension and learning as they reread and wrote down key ideas and facts from texts.

Mrs. Thompson, who teaches US history to juniors, also thought reading comprehension was an obstacle for many high school history students. For many students, the high reading level and awkward language of the S.O.L. questions skewed test results. Mrs. Thompson explained that the wide variety of reading levels also complicated the process of teaching students to read critically. "A lot of them are nonreaders or they may be able to decode the word so they can say it, but they have absolutely no idea what it means when they look a the whole sentence. They can't even decode a question." Mrs. Thompson was concerned that even if students learned the content, their poor reading skills could prevent them from performing well on the S.O.L. tests. Mrs. Thompson seemed more concerned than Mrs. Lawrence about the extensive content required, which became clear as she explained her perspectives on the conflicts that the S.O.Ls produced: "When trying to teach this much material, we *cover* it rather than *teach* it, and I think that's a mistake. Also, its very difficult to know which [information] you drill into your children to remember."

The social studies department chair, Mrs. Jones, substantiated some of the reading comprehension concerns of the other social studies teachers. Mrs. Jones explained that before the S.O.Ls, she did not feel that she had to teach as many specific facts, and she used more primary sources in her classes:

> We would read other historians' perspectives, then we would have discussions. We don't have time for that anymore. Basically they get the straight facts as the state wants them to know. . . there is not much time for analysis and connections. It's facts--names, dates, places. I used to be a good teacher-- now I'm cramming this stuff down their throats.

In the end, the teachers in my study felt inclined to concentrate on S.O.L. preparation because each student's diploma was contingent on these test scores. All four of the teachers I observed wanted their students to perform well on the tests, yet they wanted students to learn about the essence of history, culture, ideas, and problems.

Theme 3. Teachers' intentional isolation from public/political S.O.L. discussions and participation outside of school arenas.

While the S.O.Ls have not created entirely new conditions for teachers, any new public policy intrudes into the private sphere of the classroom. Public controversy, which emerged as a result of the S.O.L. social studies curriculum and high stakes assessments, offered teachers

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opportunities to enter public conversations with politicians and community members. For example, teachers were asked to submit S.O.L. curriculum and test revision suggestions on line. Teachers could also post lesson plans to the state department of education web site (Virginia Standards, 1998). While Northwest teachers chose not to submit lesson plans online nor participate in political forums, state S.O.L. requirements forced teachers to contribute indirectly to S.O.L. enforcement by collaborating with their colleagues to write S.O.L. documents. For example, the state sent the S.O.L. tests and objectives to the county, who, in turn, asked curriculum supervisors to advise teachers as they wrote lesson plans and assessments to match the S.O.L. objectives that would ultimately prepare students for the end-of-the-year S.O.L. tests. Upon completion, these teacher-created documents would be submitted to administrators, who were to evaluate teachers based on their abilities to transmit the S.O.L. content effectively.

Faced with writing documents that would eventually enter the public realm, Northwest social studies teachers were able to move between the public discourse of behavioral objectives and their private work with students. Generally, the teachers viewed the S.O.Ls objectives as guides, simplifying the complex process of choosing which historical content to teach at which grade level. For example, Mrs. Lawrence said, "The idea of standards is good because it defines parameters. The problem is that it's too much–the parameters are too large." She continued to describe the "entire millennium of world history" she had to teach during one school year. However, Mrs. Lawrence capitalized on her experiences as a World History teacher to work with the S.O.L. curriculum. "A lot of people get caught up in the amount of content that's in the S.O.Ls. "Basically, its the concept of "chunking" and relating content–you can get through or present effectively most of it. . . even though the curriculum is too big for this course." Mrs. Lawrence adapted to these demands by grouping related content and choosing logical quantities of S.O.L. objectives to teach. Mrs. Lawrence, along with other Northwest teachers, viewed the S.O.Ls as another new state mandate, written in a language teachers would have to translate into classroom practice. As with politicians who employ rhetoric to inform and persuade the public, teachers also transform the discourse of their field into activities and language their students will understand and respond to. In the case of the S.O.Ls., the professional and personal language of teachers and students clashed with the underlying messages of the "quick fix" discourse of politicians.

Northwest High School teachers translated their teaching methods into "public" S.O.L language by writing lesson plans and essential questions that matched the S.O.L. objectives. "We also have to meet to do mapping for the S.O.L. assessments," explained Mrs. Jones, the social studies department chair. "We've already written the essential questions. . . now we have to map teaching strategies." Mrs. Jones held up the three ring binder that contained all of the S.O.L. objectives for history and the explanation of the steps in the process of matching instructional methods. The process of writing the S.O.L. essential questions, which required the history teachers to break their teaching methods into observable, measurable skills, drew teachers into a public realm governed by politicians who reinforced educational and societal values that teachers seemed to oppose. The teachers resigned themselves to writing in the behaviorist discourse, accepting these S.O.L. objectives as typical of educational curricula, translating their complex work with students into observable, measurable skills.

While the Northwest teachers I observed were experienced and effective, they did not passively commit to this S.O.L. translation without criticism. Mrs. Thompson and Mrs. Jones collaborated on creating formative assessments to match the S.O.L. curriculum objectives. These teacher-designed assessments were intended to prepare students for the year-end S.O.L. multiple choice tests that had already been designed by the state. On the surface, teachers appeared to have been granted autonomy over their unit tests. However, these teacher-created tests were to cover the content set by the S.O.L. curriculum, and teachers performed this

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formative test-writing labor while the state monitored both processes and final outcomes. Mrs. Thompson described her feelings about her contributions to this documentation:

> First, the social studies department had to align instructional methods with S.O.L. objectives. Then Mrs. Jones and I sat down and came up with a list of about twenty-five assessments we use during the course of the year for these students--anywhere from outlining to graphic organizers. . . So, I guess I have a problem with having to sit here and write in these little squares--they are manufacturing work for me to do.

The word "manufacturing" in her description reflects the "factory model" of education, a term used by critical theorists to describe schools structured to efficiently produce effective citizens (Apple, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 1997). This "factory model" was evident in the S.O.L. design, with its emphasis on rote memorization, official Western curriculum, and multiple choice standardized tests. To guarantee "productivity," teachers needed to document their classroom assessment methods even though curricula and summative assessments had already been designed without these teachers' input. In spite of this needless paperwork, Northwest teachers were not forced to change their classroom assessments; they only had to produce the appropriate discourse necessary for public approval. The intrusion occurs when "busy work" replaces teachers' preparation time because they must write testimonials to their own effectiveness.

The teacher was most concerned about the narrow view of history evident in the S.O.L. curriculum was Mrs. Hanson. Along with ninth grade humanities, Mrs. Hanson taught an elective class for juniors and seniors called *Minority Cultures*. I observed a class session where students were learning about Asia. Mrs. Hanson's enthusiasm for this class was contagious; students participated actively in class discussions. Near the end of one class, a student asked about a documentary they watched about the cultural differences between Europe and Asia. "Why are they saying the Chinese school is bad?" he asked. Mrs. Hanson replied, "Sometimes a videotape is biased. This one seems to be centered toward European thinking." The narrator of this documentary implied that China's education system was inferior to Europe's, in spite of some of the obvious benefits evident in the film, as one student pointed out. While discussion on this topic came to a close as the class period ended, Mrs. Hanson's comments on the documentary reinforced the idea that there are various ways of interpreting history and culture, some of which are informed primarily by Western ideologies.

While all of the history teachers added historical content that included women and minorities, Mrs. Hanson was the only teacher who seemed to value the privacy of her classroom as a way to create individual power for her students (Morris 2000). She attempted to initiate her students into critical analyses of heritage history in a variety of ways. By viewing the classroom as a sanctuary from public scrutiny, Mrs. Hanson, encouraged students to question S.O.L.-sanctioned truths. Mrs. Hanson commented directly about the conservative ideologies that informed the creation of the S.O.L. curriculum and tests:

> Well, I have very little in the way of respect for the S.O.Ls, to tell you the truth. I feel that the S.O.Ls were developed and provided by a bunch of people who are white, middle class--and came out of the school of the fifties. And I think they purposely tried to bring all of that time period back because it enhances one groups power, I suppose.

Mrs. Hanson had evidently experienced the effects of previous mandates, and she had learned to adapt to new requirements while maintaining her philosophy of teaching students to critique history and current events.

Mrs. Hanson privately subverted the notion of heritage history by ensuring the existence of her senior-level elective social studies course called *Minority Cultures*. "Every year I have to fight to keep this class," she explains. "The administrators don't see this as an important class, but these students work well together in here--they make a lot of friends in this class that they

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normally wouldn't." Unfortunately, the last time I spoke with Mrs. Hanson, her *Minority Cultures* class had been canceled for the following semester because she "needed to teach another ninth grade class due to increased enrollment." Mrs. Hanson thought that the tightly structured S.O.L curriculum was an underlying cause. "It's the S.O.Ls," she told me. "No room for *this kind* of class."

Mr. Anderson, who took over the position of social studies department chair at the beginning of the second semester of my study, moved further into the public arena than the other teachers. Mr. Anderson was able to reconcile the public-ness of the S.O.Ls by producing "proof" of his effective teaching strategies. One of his assignments was to continue the department's work in creating curriculum documents that matched the S.O.L. essential questions and learning objectives. Mr. Anderson went beyond his duties and developed graphic representations in the form of maps and charts to illustrate historical events. With the input of other department members, Mr. Anderson created a booklet with concept maps that could be used by teachers to help students remember historical facts and understand connections among events, people, etc. in preparation for the S.O. L. tests. The charts were similar in form to the reading comprehension techniques Mrs. Lawrence used in her World History classes. The county administrators were impressed with this booklet. "They offered to buy it," Mr. Anderson said. In this situation, he took control by designing content reading strategies that reflected his and his colleagues' teaching strategies while satisfying the requirements of S.O.L. discourse. In the end, these documents also "showcased" the department's efforts to improve students' reading comprehension in preparation for the S.O.L. tests.

Conclusions

Northwest teachers have not completely given over to the structure of the S.O.Ls tests. Solutions varied from temporarily ignoring the tests to covering as much content as possible at the end of units. Those who taught students with poor reading skills emphasized comprehension strategies, so students would learn main points and perhaps improve their reading skills enough to understand the S.O.L. test questions. In spite of the S.O.L. tests, teachers were able to maintain private professional goals for their students, such as teaching them to question historical facts while critically evaluating texts. This study focused on the perspective of one group of high school teachers. Future research is needed on teacher and student outcomes in a variety of school settings.

While the conflicts these teachers experienced may be unique to social studies, teachers of other academic subjects who must teach to the S.O.Ls or other curricular mandates must also grapple with contradictions. While all of the social studies teachers insisted that they had not changed their teaching methods--only added more content--I observed occasional cramming sessions. Although I did not interview students, I observed that this cramming process turned students into passive versions of earlier selves. Otherwise actively engaged in reading, writing and discussion, students passively took notes while the teachers lectured on required S.O.L. content. Future research at Northwest High School may determine that teachers will be able to exercise more control over the curriculum design. From previous experiences, these teachers seemed to be able to "read" political trends, realizing that the Virginia Standards of Learning was another temporary mandate that would eventually run its course.

While action research methods may help teachers become more politically active, the teachers in my study were already overworked with required S.O.L. document preparation. Successful action research and other partnership programs between universities and public schools have been reported; however, universities need to go further to help teachers self-advocate and anticipate possible outcomes of unfair systems of accountability. Especially where political agendas overshadow teachers' voices, professional organizations and educational

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researchers must support teachers and administrators as they negotiate the public and political nature of their profession.

As future research determines "what works" when teachers choose to subvert political constraints placed on their professionalism, these strategies should be discussed in teacher education classes. Pre-service teachers need to be prepared for the social and political pressures they will encounter, so they can "read" the contexts of their schools and communities. In the case of the S.O.Ls, changes were not considered by the design team until parents spoke out against the tests. Pre-service teachers should consider the extent to which they are willing to influence and collaborate with administrators and parents under circumstances such as those created by the S.O.Ls. University faculty must also be prepared to assist public school teachers who are placed in the position of defending their professionalism.

Author's Note: This is an extended abstract of the original research study. A complete copy of the study may be obtained by emailing the author, a.m.smith@starpower.net.

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